DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 773 FL 801 192

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TITLE	Adult ESL in Australia.
INSTITUTION	National Languages and Literacy Inst., Melbourne (Australia).
PUB DATE	1994-06-00
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Historical Materials (060) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT	Digest of Australian Languages and Literacy Issues; n7 Jun 1994
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Education; Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; Educational History; Educational Strategies; *Educational Trends; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; *Migrant Education; Postsecondary Education; Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia

ABSTRACT

The history, scope, content, and strategies for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction in Australia, particularly in adult education, are summarized. The history of ESL instruction is traced from post-war immigration policies, through early provision for migrant education and introduction within postsecondary institutions and adult education programs. Currently, ESL programs are offered through the national Adult Migrant Education Program, postsecondary institutions, adult and community education programs, school districts, and higher education and private institutions. Program types include settlement, labor force development, community-based, vocational and workplace, and pre-college and college support programs. Curriculum development has evolved from a teacher-centered approach through local curriculum design, the communicative approach, emergence of decentralized curriculum support units, emphasis on vocational training, and competency-based instruction. A trend toward nationally standardized courses is noted. Contains eight references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA LIMITED

THE DIGEST

of Australian languages and literacy issues

JUNE 1994, NO. 7

ADULT ESL IN AUSTRALIA

Dr Anne Burns, Senior Lecturer, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR), Macquarie University

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BACKGROUND

English as a second language (ESL) programs for adults in Australia originated with the introduction of post-war immigration policies. As the countries which had traditionally provided immigrants to Australia, the United Kingdom and Eire, were no longer able to meet the demand for new settlers, the Australian Government looked to the non-English speaking countries of Europe, as new sources of immigration.

With this expansion came the realisation that a number of strategies would be required to assist the settlement of post-war immigrants. These strategies included the provision of English language instruction, and in 1947 the Commonwealth Government made the commitment to fund English language programs for migrants. It was from this commitment that the official establishment of the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP)* in 1951 originated. Its major aim (Campbell 1985) was to provide English language instruction and settlement information to adult immigrants at four stages:

- pre-embarkation
- on board ship en route to Australia
- on arrival in Australia
- after placement in employment .

Although pre-embarkation and shipboard education continued until 1977, the main focus of the AMEP has been on post-settlement language services for immigrants. Over the past forty years AMEP services have included:

- courses offered at state AMES teaching centres
- community-based programs
- workplace programs
- distance education
- self-access provision
- tutor support scheme

These services have taken the AMEP far beyond its initial focus on settlement.

Provision for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) was also gradually introduced during the 1960s and 1970s within TAFE. The development of ESOL programs was shaped by the broader educational and policy initiatives in the further education sector rather than by settlement policies. These programs were initiated in response to Government reviews of the needs of Technical and Further Education in Australia (Kangan 1974, Richardson 1975). They emphasised the need for greater access to recurrent education throughout life, including education for disadvantaged groups within Australian society.

Specialised ESOL courses within TAFE were also part of the educational response to state and Commonwealth government multicultural policies as well as to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity policies within adult educational contexts.

CURRENT CONTEXTS AND SCOPE OF ESL PROVISION

In 1992, the decision was taken by the Australian Government that the AMEP provision funded through DIEA would again focus only on settlement English language programs. ESL programs related to vocational education and training would be provided through DEET funding and would be established through a system of tendering open to both public sector and private providers.

Currently, therefore, adult ESL courses are offered across a number of institutions and providers. They include the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), Technical and Further Education (TAFE), Adult and Community Education, Departments of School Education and tertiary and private institutions. This provision involves a wide range programs, including:

- settlement programs which offer initial courses of instruction in Australia
- labour market programs
- community-based programs
- vocational and workplace programs
- pre-tertiary and tertiary support programs.

These programs encompass various modes of delivery which include classroom courses, language support as adjuncts to other programs, linked skills programs, English in the workplace arrangements, individual study and self-access, the tutor support scheme and distance learning.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT ESL IN AUSTRALIA

In the early days of post-war adult ESL provision in Australia, a centralised model of curriculum operated, reflecting the assimilationist policies of the times (Nunan 1988, Ozolins 1993). 'Situational English', an early approach to the teaching of adult ESL which was developed in the 1960s and early 1970s, took this centralised approach. These materials and the procedures for teaching them were designed centrally by the Commonwealth Government and disseminated to a range of educational institutions responsible through Commonwealth-State funding arrangements for ESL provision.

The pedagogical approach adopted was essentially teacher-centred. The teacher was responsible through the use of the 'direct

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ACN 051 438 825. ISSN 1 875578 36 6. © NLLIA 1995

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method' for the delivery of the teaching content which was based almost exclusively on differing levels of proficiency in English. The use of other languages either as a medium for teaching or as a linguistic resource in the classroom was generally frowned upon.

During the mid to late 1970s, educational thinking and research led to 'the "school-based" curriculum development movement' (Nunan 1988), where curriculum was developed locally and was considered to be more responsive to learners' needs. The learner was seen as an active participant in the learning process and learner needs formed the basis for curriculum planning. Coupled with this more general school-based curriculum movement, was the growing appreciation in language education of the need for ESL learners to acquire communicative skills, as well as structural knowledge of language.

These converging influences gave rise to what became known as the 'communicative language teaching approach'. This was a learner-centred view of language teaching and language development which saw the negotiation of learner needs as central to the processes of curriculum planning and course design. This approach placed emphasis on the learner as a major source of information for the teacher in the selection and sequencing of learning content. It focused attention on factors beyond English language proficiency, such as ethnic and linguistic background previous educational experiences, and literacy levels in first and second language. It also considered affective factors resulting from anxiety, trauma or the cultural effects of immigration and a range of cross-cultural issues, such as the degree of similarity or difference between Australian cultural practices and those of the learner's country of origin.

Communicative language teaching with its highly decentralised approach to course design within the individual classroom meant that from the late 1970s and early 1980s, teachers became the primary curriculum developers. This role required the development of a number of curriculum related skills, including learner placement, assessment, needs analysis, objective setting, the selection and sequencing of content and materials and the monitoring and evaluation of programs.

Within the AMEP, the Campbell Review of 1985 recommended the development of curriculum and resources, the setting up of curriculum development support units within the various state AMESs and the establishment of a National Key Centre for research and teaching to service, as part of its role, the AMEP. An early outcome of these recommendations was the establishment of the National Curriculum Resource Centre (NCRC) in Adelaide. In 1988, the NCRC was incorporated into the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR) at Macquarie University, the Key Centre recommended in the Campbell Review.

Many ESL teaching programs were, by this time, highly decentralised and individualised and during the mid 1980s there were calls for greater continuity and sequencing between the various courses in which learners were enrolling (Campbell 1985). This move towards improved 'learner pathways' coincided in the late 1980s and early 1990s with changing economic circumstances and, as a consequence, an increased emphasis on vocational education and training, the move towards competency-based training, the push for a national system of accreditation and an increasing focus on measurable outcomes (Lipa 1993).

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ESL PROVISION

The impact of these changes on ESL programs has meant that most institutions have developed or are developing accredited and competency-based curriculum frameworks or curriculum documents (see *Prospect*, issue 9.2). A number are accredited nationally, such as:

- *The Certificate in Spoken and Written English* (developed by NSW AMES in association with NCELTR)
- *The Advanced Certificate in Spoken and Written English* (NSW AMES)
- *The Certificate in English for Employment* (TAFE NSW)
- *The Certificate in English for Vocational Purposes* (TAFE NSW)
- *The Certificate in Intermediate English Proficiency* (Second Language) (DETAFE SA)
- *The Certificate in Advanced English Proficiency* (Second Language) (DETAFE SA)

Other curricula have been developed at State/provider level. These include:

- *The Certificate in Education for Adult Immigrants from non-English Speaking Backgrounds*, CN 277 (Queensland TAFE)
- *The Certificate in English for Speakers of Other Languages* (NSW TAFE Commission, Foundation Studies Training Division)
- *The Certificate in ESL: at Elementary, Intermediate or Advanced Level* (Canberra Institute of Technology, ACT)
- *The English in the Workplace Competencies Framework* (NSW AMES)
- *The Certificate in General Education for Adults* .(ACFE/OTFE Victoria)

(The curricula listed above are representative of those known to be accredited at the time of writing.)

In the community and private sectors there are a number of non-accredited courses offered. In some cases, there are formal and informal links between these sectors and the major providers which enable them to draw on existing curriculum frameworks and materials. In many tertiary institutions, ESL curriculum development also draws on or refers to accredited curricula, although curriculum outcomes in these programs must necessarily relate closely to academic needs and the demands of academic curricula.

The curriculum development initiatives reflected by these documents represent a response to changing national policies in adult education. They have emerged from the requirement on the one hand to preserve the notion of needs-based, learner-centred and locally responsive courses and on the other to recognise the increasing need for learner pathways and accredited curricula for adult ESL learners in Australia.

* *Now known as the Adult Migrant English Program*

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